

MOON HANDBOOKS TAHITI: INCLUDING THE COOK ISLANDS

by David Stanley

Avalon Travel Publishing, 2003; \$17.95; 432 pages
ISBN 1-56691-412-4 / ISSN 1-544-0842

Review by Shawn McLaughlin

Anyone familiar with David Stanley's *South Pacific* (one of the Moon Handbooks series) will recognize similarities between its Easter Island coverage and that which is contained in this, the 5th edition of his *Tahiti*. And it's apparent that he updates his information regularly (new references to land redistribution and the voyage of the *Hōkule'a*, for example). Or *some* of it, anyway. He lists Benito Rapahango as proprietor for Mahinatur, despite the fact that Benito died in September of 2002 (Mahinatur is still in operation, with Julio Lagos as proprietor, and is now located at Residencial O Tama Te Ra'a. Phone/fax: 100-220 /100-420; mahinatur@entelchile.net); he states that all the work at the Rano Raraku quarry stopped abruptly; he repeats the erroneous story of islanders being taken to the Peruvian guano mines (and that *all* learned men of the island were lost as a result); and he says that the winning swimmer in the Birdman competition became the Birdman for the next year. (Some of these same errors occur in his *South Pacific Handbook* but that's not too surprising since they obviously derive from the same copy.) He does refrain from making the same mistake that many of his contemporaries have made when they fail to explain that two of the island museum's *rongorongo* artifacts are replicas – though he tends to gloss over the museum generally, devoting only 50 words to it and the new Mulloy Library.

I do have it on good authority that the aforementioned errors will be corrected in not only the next edition of *Tahiti* but also *South Pacific*. And, to be fair, Stanley uses the more appropriate *nga'atu* instead of *titora* reeds and rightly complains about the loudness of the Toroko Disco when staying at the Hotel O'tai (though the solution to this is simple: ear-plugs). He properly admonishes people about disturbing bones found at various sites around the island and includes a new section on how to conduct oneself respectfully on the island (*vis-a-vis* the archaeological sites).

Some things have not been updated. For example, an ATM machine is *outside* the bank (it accepts Bank of Chile and MasterCard and was operational in October 2002), and the U.S. airport reciprocity (entry) tax is stated as \$61 when as of October 2003 it was \$100 (even a year ago it was up to \$91).

But don't be unduly distracted by this recitation, as they represent a fraction of the coverage that is otherwise clear, concise, and up-to-date. Stanley is refreshingly honest in describing the controversies involving land redistribution and inane development plans (e.g., the 5-star hotel and golf course) – "one special-interest group clawing against another; the world on a small scale". And he offers extensive details about accommodations that are rarely available elsewhere. His Hanga Roa map is one of the most accurate to date and the two-page spread devoted to Easter Island Internet resources is invaluable.

Although I've focused on the Easter Island portion of the book in this review, it's important to note that about 95 percent of David Stanley's *Tahiti* is not about Easter Island. In fact, of the three main sections of the book, the bulk is contained in the sections on French Polynesia and the Cook Islands. The section on French Polynesia covers Tahiti, Mo'orea, Huahine, Ra'iatea and Taha'a, Bora Bora, Maupiti, Austral Islands, Tuamotu Islands, Gambier Islands, and Marquesas Islands; the section on the Cook Islands covers Rarotonga and the Southern and Northern Groups; and the section on Easter Island covers, well, Easter Island – but that's what you'd expect unless you are floridly intoxicated after visiting the fruit juice factory on Mo'orea.

In his very approachable style, Stanley provides loads of information on history, customs, holidays and events, arts and shopping, services, transportation, and lots of little trivia tidbits. His section "Tahiti in Literature" is a rare gem. Two dozen pages at the back of the book are devoted to a rudimentary glossary, a listing of basic Tahitian and French terms, suggested reading, Internet resources, and island facts (which doesn't include Easter Island and indeed any non-"permanently inhabited islands of French Polynesia and the Cook Islands", alas). This makes *Tahiti* one of the best investments for the traveler to and from this region of the world.

One thing that has always impressed me about Stanley's guides is the fact that they're written by him as a traveler and not as a guidebook writer. He travels anonymously when researching his books and thus doesn't receive special treatment at hotels or restaurants. This makes it a lot easier for the reader to trust his opinions. And since Stanley emphasizes mid-priced accommodations and activities, you have a better appreciation of what it's really likely to cost.

Whether you're settled down, heading east, or heading west, with Tahiti at the center and Stanley's very centered information at your disposal, this book will help you find your way.

80

MOON HANDBOOKS MICRONESIA (Sixth Edition)

by Neil M. Levy

Avalon Travel Publishing, Emeryville, CA, 2003. 316 pp.
(B&W photos & illustrations, 72 maps, charts, annotated
booklist, glossary, travel information and index.) US\$17.95,
paper. ISBN 1-56691-508-2 and 1543-7019.

Review by Felicia R. Beardsley
University of California, Riverside

Micronesia is a highly diverse region with thousands of islands scattered across some 4.5 million square miles of open water in the western Pacific. From the air, the region looks as if handfuls of pearls had been loosed from a string and haphazardly strewn across a velvety fabric of the deepest blue. As you begin your approach, however, these pearls start to take shape, revealing coral, volcanic and continental islands of varying shapes and sizes, some highly dissected with steep jungle terrain, others a thin ribbon of green hugging close to the water's surface. As both a cultural and geological paradise, Micronesia presents the inveterate trekker or novice trav-

eler with a farrago of peoples, cultures, languages, landscapes, and environments. Just trying to get around can be confusing, with a new set of challenges arising at every turn. Enter Neil Levy's latest edition of *Moon Handbooks Micronesia*.

Levy has provided a wonderful shortcut through the initial confusion of arrival and slow acquaintance of place that inevitably follows. In a well-written, descriptive style that both entertains and informs, Levy has systematically organized the region archipelago by archipelago, using as his default modern political boundaries established during post-war negotiations. He covers everything from the logistics of getting around, to health tips, to practicalities of food and accommodations, to must-see sights, and recreational opportunities. Yet, he also captures the diversity of the region through photographs and line drawings, as well as detailed descriptions that cover both the natural and cultural (social, economic, and government organization) environment. To further orient the reader, he provides several maps of the main islands within each archipelago, as well as details of those islands as needed.

And, like any new edition of an old favorite, some things have changed; some have remained the same. New additions include a more aesthetically pleasing organization to the text, a new type style dressing its pages, and chapter subheadings wrapped in broad bands of gray providing the visual cue that we have shifted gears and are now entering a new section of information. New too are shaded thumb tabs for each chapter. I like this as it allows for a more efficacious search—particularly if you want to locate a specific island group without having to thumb your way through the entire book each and every time. Other changes include a regional map in the very front of the book with insets that list the relevant maps of each archipelago along with their accompanying pages, and a consolidated chapter on American Possessions that had been divided into two chapters in the previous edition (although, in recent years, possession of Wake Atoll has been the subject of a growing dispute, with the people of the Marshall Islands arguing for its proper designation within the mapping bounds of the Republic of the Marshall Islands; it is, they say, traditionally theirs and has never been legally ceded to the US). The one change that should not have been made, in my estimation, is the elimination of colored maps. In this new edition, all maps are black and white, making them more difficult to pick out from the rest of the illustrations in the book. This is a small matter, but one that a map-person considers important.

Moon Handbooks Micronesia serves as a master key to a region that is very culturally diverse. It is both enjoyable to read and highly informative, with all the basic information one needs to travel through Micronesia with relative ease. Thanks to Levy, you don't have to be highly proficient in learning new customs, compile word lists on your own, or struggle with the overwhelming task of grasping local protocols that often go unexplained. Levy even includes a table of alternative place names right up front. This is particularly welcome as the region as a whole has been undergoing a resurgence of pride in the revitalization of traditional place names, as well as improvements and changes in its orthogra-

phies with new spellings of old places appearing almost daily. This table also serves as one more reminder that Micronesia is a region in continual flux, where change is both welcomed and inevitable. Levy's *Moon Handbooks Micronesia* is a nice accompaniment to witness this change for any traveler to the region.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

The paper on the *Jubaea* palms by H-R Bork and A Mieth (RNJ 17/2:119) presents a plausible scenario, but prompts some observations. One might imagine that people dependent upon the palms would notice before 'the feller of the last tree' did his work, especially since Hunter-Anderson tells us that at least some island people are sensitive to the ecological fragility of their environment. On the other hand, recall the difficulty of establishing parks to prevent Pacific Northwest loggers from cutting the last of the old-growth redwoods. Again, one can trace the progressive deforestation of the Mediterranean by following the center of ship building in the *Penguin Historical Atlas*. The authors note that the palms tend to grow in clumps: if they are like date palms (*Dactylifera*), clonal reproduction via 4-7 offshoots surrounding the original trunk is a normal process. Finally, a use for palm syrup which is unmentioned, but which I would nominate as its major function, is that it ferments easily to palm 'wine'. The consumption of 2 liters of syrup per day seems excessive, but it is not unusual for an Irish pub dweller to down several liters of Guinness in an evening.

Sincerely, Ferren McIntyre
National University of Ireland, Galway.
<http://www.geocities.com/ferrenmaci/>

Dear Editor,

In regard to the article by Hans-Rudolf Bork and Andreas Mieth on the *Jubaea* palm on Rapa Nui, I like articles that give concrete figures about a subject: 16.24 million palm trees on Rapa Nui providing 1.6 million liters of sap per year for 500 years is a considerable amount. The writers base this on 1,400 *Jubaea* palm trees per hectare. I have checked this with my data from the time I was manager of an oil palm company. For the *Elaeis Guineensis* Jack it has been calculated that, if the distance from stem to stem is less than 7.75 meters, mature palms (in a plantation they are all of the same age) start encroaching on each other. That gives a maximum of around 150 trees per hectare. Without cultivation you have many young palms coming up between the mature ones, but they are not yet productive. The writers arrive at an average total of 1,400 palms per hectare, nearly 10 times as much as for the oil palm. Then one must take into consideration that the *Jubaea* grows much higher than the oil palm, and it also has a bigger canopy, requiring more room and certainly a much thicker trunk. At 2.60 meters for the horizontal distance and 1,400 per hectare this means there are virtually only stems. I wonder if there is not a calculating error?

I like their explanation that the *Jubaea* trunks were used more for fuel than for *moai* transport. You do not need so many for transport and you would be able to use them again